Vigiliae Christianae 46 (1992), 1-19, E. J. Brill, Leiden

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS AND THE ORIGINS OF GNOSTICISM

BY

GILLES QUISPEL

Dedicated to Joost R. Ritman
mercurial agathodaimon

Armenian Hermes

In 1982 Jean-Pierre Mahé published his French translation of an Armenian gnomology entitled *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*. This contained the following Saying:

> Who knows himself, knows the All.[1]

Hermes was held to be an ancient Egyptian, but this saying of his was in tune with Greek philosophy. The temple of Delphi admonished its visitors to know themselves. And according to the Stoic philosopher Poseidonios of Apameia man should follow always and at all times the *daimon* within us, the *Logos*, who is akin to and of the same nature as the *Daimon* without, the *Pneuma* or God who pervades the universe.[2]

The Hermetic Saying can easily be older than the *Poimandres*. This writing describes how *Anthrōpos* descends from the world of God above to create, but falls in love with lower nature and falls into matter. Nature then brings forth the bodies after the shape (*eidos*) of *Anthrōpos* (17).[3]

The background of this myth has become completely clear in recent research.[4] The prophet Ezekiel described the Glory of God in the form of a man, the *demuth kemarēh adam* or *eidos anthrōpou*. This became the stock theme of Jewish Gnosis until the present day. Already in the second century before Christ the dramatist Ezekiel Tragicus in Alexandria described this Glory as *Phōs*, Man, a hypostasis of the hidden God. The *Anthrōpos* of so many Gnostic writings from Nag Hammadi is none other than Ezechiel's *Kabod*. Sometimes he is called *Geradamas, Geraios Adam* or *Adam Qadmon*. He is, as in the *Poimandres*, the

archetype of the human body. That looks like the Middle-Platonic concept of the idea of man applied to the Genesis story. But it is only in Manichaeism that the archetypal man falls into concupiscence and matter. Of course all this has nothing to do with a prechristian Iranian myth of the Saved Saviour, *Gayomart* or Mortal Life. It rather serves as an illustration of the Hermetic *Definition* quoted above which underlies a well-known passage in the *Poimandres* (13):

> Let the spiritual man *know himself* as being immortal and (then he may know) that *eros* is the cause of death and (he may know) all things.

As is so often the case in the Hermetic writings, first was the Saying, then came the story.

Hellenistic Hermes

Inspired by the magnificent findings of Jean-Pierre Mahé his compatriot the Reverend Father J. Paramelle has identified a number of Hermetic abstracts in Greek in the manuscript *Clarke* II of the Bodleian library of Oxford, among which are some Greek fragments of the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* preserved in Armenian.[5]

One of them runs as follows:

> Ἄνθρωπος ἀμφοτέρας ἔχει τὰς φύσεις,
> καὶ τὴν θνητὴν καὶ τὴν ἀθάνατον.
> Ἄνθρωπος τρεῖς οὐσίας ἔχει, τὴν νοητὴν
> καὶ τὴν ψυχικὴν καὶ τὴν ὑλικήν.
>
> VI, 1

> Man has the two natures,
> Both the mortal and the immortal.
> Man has three essences,
> spiritual, vital ("psychic") and material.

Of course this tripartition is grounded in Platonic and Platonist psychology. But Plato himself never uses *hylé*, nor does he ever oppose the "psychic" to the "noetic". It would seem that for him the *nous* is a part of the *psyché*. In a magical papyrus (*PGM* 4.524f and 510) "*psychikos*" denotes the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it in contrast to the supernatural world, which is characterised by *pneuma*. But this papyrus must be of a later date than the Hermetic

Definitions; and "*pneuma*" is not "*nous*". I know of no other prechristian writing in which the distinction of "psychic" and "noetic" can be found. In any case it is quite certain now that the famous gnostic tripartition can be traced back to and localised in a Hermetic lodge of Alexandria and is clearly of pagan origin.

Catholic Hermes

There is an echo of this scheme in another Alexandrian writing, *The Teachings of Silvanus*. That is a Catholic writing, in its present form dating to the fourth century, but in part still reflecting second century views.[6] As in this case:

> But before everything else, know your origin.
> Know yourself, from what substance you are and from what race and from what tribe.
> Understand that you have come into being from three races:
> from the earth,
> from the moulded
> and from the begotten.
> The body has come into being from the earth with an earthly substance,
> but the moulded, for the sake of the soul, has come into being from the thought of the Divine.
> The begotten, however, is the spirit (*nous*), which has come into being in conformity with the image of God.
>
> VII, 4, 92, 10f.[7]

The Hermetic scheme has been combined here with the story of Genesis, more specifically Gen. 1,27, about the image of God in man and Gen. 2,7, about the breath in the nostrils. But the original Platonic terminology, *nous*, not *pneuma*, has been preserved. And this would suggest that *The Teachings of Silvanus*, a Catholic writing, has not been influenced by Christian Gnosticism of Alexandria, which invariably used "*pneuma*" in this context.

Gnostic Hermes

Valentinus and his followers distinguished three classes of man, hylics, psychics and pneumatics and opposed spiritual, intuitive, to "psychic", that is logic and discursive and heavenly:

Adam received a spiritual germ that was sowed
by Sophia stealthily into his soul...
in order that the bone, his logic and heavenly
soul, not be empty, but full of spiritual marrow.
Excerpta ex Theodoto, 53, 2-5

Thus Adam could beget three different types of man, materialists, true believers and spiritual people:

From Adam three natures were born, first
the *irrational*, to which Cain belonged;
secondly
the *rational* and righteous;
thirdly
the *intuitive* type, men like Seth
Excerpta, 54,1

The leader of the Western school of Valentinianism, Heracleon or a pupil of his, or whoever wrote the *Tripartite Treatise* of the *Jung Codex*, amplified this scheme into a grandiose concept of world history: the *Logos* (Sophia) has to go through the *inferno* of natural paganism and the *purgatorio* of religion and ethics, Israel, before it can attain through Christ to the realm of spiritual freedom. But already before Valentinus the sect of the Gnostikoi, superficially christianised but rooted in a rebellious Judaism of Alexandria, which is responsible for the *Apokryphon of John* and so many other writings from Nag Hammadi, knew of a cruel demiurge, who unconsciously blew his *pneuma* into Adam, which distinguishes the pneumatic race of the Sethians from earthy materialists and narrow-minded believers:

And they said to Yaltabaoth, "Blow into his face something of your *pneuma* and his body will arise". And he blew into his face the spirit which is the power of his mother: he did not know this, for he lives unconsciously.
Apokryphon of John, II, 1, 19.[8]

Hermes and esoteric Judaism

Why was it that all those gnostics, most of them from Alexandria, rendered *nešama* with *pneuma* when interpreting Genesis 2,7:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and man became a living soul.

What is more, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria uses the word "pneuma" a dozen times when alluding to this breath.[9] Let me make myself clear. I do not even for a moment believe that Philo ever was a Gnostic. It can not even be said that he was "not yet Gnostic". How could one of the richest men of Alexandria, who did not suffer from the *galuth*, have the tragic sense of Gnostic alienation? No, Philo was opposed to incipient Gnosticism in the Alexandrian Jewry and liked to polemicise with it stealthily. Perhaps he is doing this when he remarks that the breath is nothing but an *aura*, not really a *pneuma*.

> He (Moses) uses the word "breath" (*pnoé*), but not "spirit" (*pneuma*), thus implying that there is a difference between them: for "spirit" is conceived of as connoting strength and vigour and power, a "breath" is like an air (*aura*) or a gentle and mild vapour.
>
> *Legum Allegoriae* 1, 42, Colson-Whitaker I, 173

Is he trying to give a more orthodox sense to this essential passage of the Septuagint? One would be inclined to suppose so. In any case *pneuma* was already then a variant reading. In that case Genesis 2,7 in an ancient version of the Septuagint would contain the elements:

> dust (*hylé*)
> *pneuma*
> *psyché*

And Philo seems to acknowledge that mankind consists of different natures:

> Exactly, then, as God has conceived a hatred for pleasure and the body without giving reasons, so too has he promoted *goodly natures* (φύσεις) apart from any manifest reason. For should anyone ask why the prophet (Moses) says that Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord God (Gen. VI,8) when as yet he had, so far as our knowledge goes, done no fair deed, we shall give a suitable answer to the effect that he is shown to be of an *excellent nature* from his birth (συστάσεως καὶ γενέσεως).
>
> *Legum Allegoriae*, III, 77, Colson-Whitaker I, 351

Adolf Hönig, in his important but unrecognized book about the origins of Gnosticism, long ago observed that the three classes of man were to be found in Philo's *De gigantibus* 60 (271):[10]

> So, then, it is no myth at all of giants that he sets before us;
> rather he wishes to show you that
> some men are earth-born,
> some heaven-born and
> some God-born.

> The earth-born are those who take the pleasures of the body for their quarry, who make it their practice to indulge in them and enjoy them and provide the means by which each of them may be promoted.
> The heaven-born are the votaries of the arts and of knowledge, the lovers of learning. For the heavenly element in us is the mind (νοῦς) as the heavenly beings are each of them a mind. And it is the mind which pursues the learning of the schools and the other arts one and all, which sharpens and whets itself, aye and trains and drills itself solid in the contemplation of what is intelligible by mind.
> But the men of God are priests and prophets who have refused to accept membership in the commonwealth of the world and to become citizens therein, but have risen wholly above the sphere of sense-perception and have been translated into the world of the intelligible and dwell there registered as freemen of the commonwealth of Ideas, which are imperishable and incorporeal.
>
> Colson-Whitaker II, 475

Notice how the νοῦς is degraded here to the extroverted discursive intellect, whereas you have to be begotten by God, probably through the grace of his pneuma, to become a citizen of the city of God, after having become nothing but an exiled sojourner in this kosmos.

The tripartition of body (flesh), *psyché* and *pneuma* seems to be presupposed here. In any case three classes of men are mentioned in this passage. It would seem that the Hermetic tripartition mentioned in the aphorism we quoted had been taken over by liberal-minded Jews of Alexandria, who linked it up with the Genesis story and spoke of *pneumatikos* instead of *noētos* under the influence of Genesis 2,7.

Hermes and Apollos

It is time now to discuss the brilliant exegesis of Paul's first *Letter to the Corinthians* 1-4 offered by Birger Pearson in his recent book on the Jewish origins of Gnosticism (quoted in n. 9). There Paul has a discussion with opponents within the congregation about *psychikoi* and *pneumatikoi* culminating in the remark that the *psychikos anthrōpos* does not sense spiritual views because they are foolishness to him. We, however, St. Paul adds, have the "*noun*", that is: we have the "*pneuma*" of Christ (2,16). Pearson suggests that the apostle is polemicising with and using the terminology of Apollos and his faction in Corinth. Apollos was born in Alexandria and was said to be most eloquent and mighty in Scriptures. He could have learned in his hometown to differentiate between a lower animal soul and a higher divine spirit,

basing himself on the Hellenistic exegesis of Genesis 2,7 that was usual in liberal quarters of Jewish Alexandria.

Numenius and Alexandrian Judaism

I think I have found some confirmation for this hypothesis in a passage in the Christian fourth century philosopher Calcidius, which the late and lamented Waszink edited in such an admirable way.[11] Calcidius quotes there the second century Middle-Platonist philosopher Numenius who in his turn refers to some Jewish sages. The latter seem to be authors of a fragment, in which Numenius distinguishes between *a first God* who sows the germ of every soul as an emanation, a προβολή in all what conceives it, and a lower *Lawgiver*, called the demiurge, who plants and distributes and transplants in all of us the souls which descended from on high:

> Ὥσπερ δὲ πάλιν λόγος ἐστὶ γεωργῷ πρὸς
> τὸν φυτεύοντα, ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον
> μάλιστά ἐστιν ὁ πρῶτος θεὸς πρὸς τὸν δημιουργόν.
> Ὁ μέν γε ὢν σπέρμα πάσης ψυχῆς σπείρει
> εἰς τὰ μεταλαγχάνοντα αὐτοῦ χρήματα σύμπαντα·
> ὁ νομοθέτης δὲ φυτεύει καὶ διανέμει καὶ
> μεταφυτεύει εἰς ἡμᾶς ἑκάστους τὰ ἐκείθεν
> προκαταβεβλήμενα.
>
> fragment 13, des Places 55

> There does exist a certain rapport between the owner of a plantation and a labourer-planter;
> that same rapport exists between the first God and the Master builder of the Universe.
> The One who is Being itself sows the sperma of every soul in whatever conceives it.
> On the other hand the Lawgiver distributes the souls that at first emanated from the God beyond god into the human bodies of each of us and cultivates each of them and transplants them (into new bodies if they are not yet purified).
>
> (cf. Festugière, *Révélation* III, 44)

If this interpretation is correct, then these Jewish sages whom Numenius so often mentions may have been esoteric Jews of Alexandria, who, since the time of Ezekiel the dramatist, used to distinguish between the hidden God and the Glory, called *Anthrōpos* or *Phōs*, archetypal Man.[12] But whether they were esoteric or not, Alexandrian or not, in

any case they distinguished between the human body formed from the earth, a vital, astral soul brought down from the spheres of heaven and the divine logos which is a gracious gift of the highest God, as the following passage shows:

> Quod quidem verum esse testatur eminens quaedam doctrina sectae sanctioris et in comprehensione divinae rei prudentioris, quae perhibet deum absoluto illustratoque sensili mundo genus hominum instituentem
> *corpus* quidem eius parte humi sumpta iuxta hanc effigiem aedificasse formasseque,
> *vitam* vero eidem ex convexis accersisse caelestibus, postque intimis eius *inspirationem* proprio flatu intimasse,
> inspirationem hanc dei consilium animae rationemque significans.
> Et ratio dei deus est humanis rebus consulens, quae causa est hominibus bene beateque vivendi,
> si non concessum sibi *munus* summo a deo neglegant
> Calcidius, *Timaeus* LV, Waszink 103, 1-9

Translation:

> That this must be true is proven by an admirable doctrine of a holy group (secta) which has an eminent insight in theological truth.
> It holds that God after having achieved and decorated the visible world, has brought forth the human race:
> first he built and formed the *body* from earth after this image (= the image of the Kosmos);[13]
> then he summoned *life* from the spheres of heaven;
> afterwards he involved his *pneuma* into its interior by blowing his own breath (into the body's nostrils),
> (by *pneuma* indicating the consciousness and logos of the soul).
> And this *logos* of God, which is itself god, is directing human behaviour and as such the cause of a good and happy life for the human beings, but only in the case that they do not neglect *this gift which the highest God bestowed on them.*

This is a remarkable passage. It relates the views of Jews who gave a platonising interpretation of Genesis 2,7. Calcidius must have taken it from Numenius.[14] It distinguishes between a vital and astral psyché and a reasonable spirit. When it proclaims that this psyche has its origin in the heavenly spheres, one is reminded of the *Anthrōpos* in the *Poimandres*, who is given part of the passions of all the seven planets, which man gives back to them after his death on his journey on high (24).

One can perhaps be more specific. Joan P. Couliano has shown convincingly that the theme of the soul's heavenly journey originated in primitive Orphism which seems to have been indebted indirectly to the

religion of the shamans who become "high" even in our time.[15] But according to the same author the doctrine of the soul's descent through the spheres of the seven planets has its roots in the astrologic lore of the Hermetic Panaretos (±200 B.C.) and is transmitted in three versions:

1. Possibly in Middle Platonism and certainly in later Neo-Platonism this doctrine simply means that at birth the soul descends from the Milky Way through the spheres of the seven planets and from each of them assumes certain qualities necessary for the new being to exist on earth.

2. In Gnosticism, starting with the (originally Jewish) *Apokryphon of John* and with Basilides of Alexandria (first half second century A.D.) the doctrine is negative: from the seven planetary Rulers (Archons) the soul assumes an astral body of seven vices (including concupiscence) which most Gnostics call the *antimimon pneuma* or counterfeit spirit. The second century philosopher Numenius (whose views are preserved by the fourth century Latin Platonist Macrobius) seems to be of the same opinion. The Gnostics aim to be delivered from the astrological Fate and the astrological *antimimon pneuma.*

3. In Neo-Platonism we have a positive version of the same myth in the doctrine of the *ochèma* or vehicle of the soul.[16]

It seems not to have been observed before that Numenius in this respect, as so often, has been inspired by his Jewish source, the liberal quarters of esoteric Alexandria. So were the Gnostics. The *Poimandres* is tributary to the same circles. These Jewish Gnostics obviously had identified the *antimimon pneuma* with the *evil inclination*, the *jeṣer hara*ᶜ of Pharisaic lore. Mani, who stands in the Gnostic tradition, simplified this view: far from teaching two souls, as Augustine suggests, he opposed the spirit to the flesh. Merkabah mysticism of Palestine, which teaches ascent during this life, is rooted in these heterodox traditions. Moreover, it is rather un-Greek and unphilosophical to admit that the Spirit is not part of man, but a gracious and undeserved gift of God.

There existed indeed in antiquity a holy order, which taught the latter view; these were the Essenes from Qumran at the Dead Sea:

> I, the Master, know Thee, O my God
> by the spirit which Thou hast given to me,
> and by Thy Holy Spirit I have faithfully hearkened
> to Thy marvellous counsel.
> In the mystery of Thy wisdom
> Thou hast opened knowledge to me
> and in Thy mercies

Thou has unlocked for me the fountain of Thy might.
Hymn 19, Vermès 189

I do not for a moment believe that Numenius was familiar with the views of the Essenes. It is, however, very Jewish to believe that the Spirit is a gift, which can even be taken from man. It cannot be completely excluded that besides the Hermetic lodge, visited by Greeks, Copts and Jews indiscriminately, there existed in Alexandria a *sort of Bnē Berith* lodge, for liberal Jews exclusively, and that the two influenced each other.

Esoteric Jewish influence on Hermes

Already the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* evidence this Jewish impact:

The spirit is not in every soul.
X, 3, Mahé 399
Every man has a body and a soul, but not every soul has a spirit.
VII, 4, Mahé 387

These Sayings are integrated and developed in the *Poimandres* and the *Asclepius*:

Do not all men have a spirit?—Silence, you fool, take care of what you are saying.
Poimandres 22
Non omnes, o Asclepi, intelligentiam veram adepti sunt.
Asclepius 7

And the fourth treatise of the Corpus Hermeticum, called *Krater* or *Monas*, reveals that the *logos*, discursive reasoning, is a faculty of all human beings, but that one has to be baptized in order to receive the spirit during that ritual ceremony and becomes an initiate.

This Hermetic and Jewish esoteric doctrine was preserved by Valentinus and his school. The great stylist and antignosticus Tertullian gave it a pregnant and unforgettable formulation in his writing against the Valentinians:

Spiritale enim ex Seth de obvenientia superducunt iam non naturam sed indulgentiam, ut quod Achamoth de superioribus in animas bonas depluat.
(XXIX, 3)

In his most excellent commentary on *adversus Valentinianos* Professor Jean-Claude Fredouille observes that *obvenientia*, a *hapax legomenon*, "s'oppose à nature, innéité," whereas "*non natura sed indulgentia*" according to him means: "*non natura, sed donatum gratiosum*".[17] So I translate:

> "As a matter of fact they add the spiritual element symbolised by Seth as a casual accessory, which is not a natural attribute but a gracious gift, because Achamoth lets it rain down in good souls".

This means that the Valentinian Gnosis is not an idealistic philosophy of identity but a mysticism of grace. It now transpires that the same is true of the Hermetic Gnosis. The origins of this influential concept perhaps are to be sought in the monastery of Qumran and the liberal Jewish lodge of Alexandria.

Valentinus and Mani

Mani was familiar with the Valentinian division of mankind into the *Pneumatikoi*, the *Psychikoi* and the *Hylikoi* (or *Sōmatikoi*) and discusses it in one of his discourses in the *Kephalaia* (CXV, 270, 13-23), as Samuel N. C. Lieu rightly observes in his seminal study "*Manichaeism*".[18] Valentinus and Mani have much in common. The kernel of their doctrine is that empirical man, his conscious *ego* so to speak, has to form a syzygie, a *mysterium conjunctionis*, with his guardian angel or transcendental Self: this is an amplification of the Greek and Jewish view that man has a (male!) daimon or guardian angel who resembles him as two drops of water and is called in Hebrew *īqonin*.[19] And certainly Mani was familiar with the Valentinian interpolation in the *Acts of John* (94-102), according to which Jesus at the Last Supper danced the suffering of agonising mankind and was said to suffer with suffering mankind. Mani picked that up and conceived the image of *Jesus patibilis, ex omni pendens ligno* and suffering in all men, animals and plants. The *Cologne Mani Codex* has finally proved that this awe-inspiring vision goes back to Mani himself.

Hermes and Mani

It is no less certain that the Hermetic Gnosis influenced Manichaean beginnings. Faustus plausibly argues that Hermes was an ancient

prophet for us Gentiles, whereas the prophets of Israel spoke to the Jews who had accepted the Messiah.[20] Ephrem Syrus mentions Hermes among the primeval sages of Manichaeism.[21] And a middle Persian fragment (M 788, 2-8) enumerates Hermas the Pastor (Hermes the Poimen of Men?) among the apostles of true religion.[22] Where East and West agree, we are on solid ground. But also indirectly Mani was familiar with Hermetic lore. He knew and loved the *Gospel of Thomas*, written about 140 A.D. in Edessa and reflecting the Encratite shade of Aramaic Christianity. There Mani read:

> Jesus says: Whoever knows everything, but fails to know himself, fails to know the All (67).

I am not at all sure that Jesus ever said this. It seems more probable that the author of the *Gospel of Thomas* found it in the above mentioned Hermetic gnomology:

> Who knows himself, knows the All.

The myth of the Self, as we all know, is of Greek origin. Hermes picked it up in the Greek quarters of Alexandria. But it had been integrated at an early date both by Catholic and by Encratite Christianity. The influence of Encratism on Mani was enormous.[23] And so the myth of the Self became an essential doctrine of Manichaeism:

> "Jesus the Splendour approached sinless Adam and awoke him from the sleep of death, that he might be delivered of innumerable demons... Then Adam examined himself and realized, who he was."
>
> Theodor bar Konai[24]

It has been argued that the concept of a spirit or Self in man has a tradition in Iran that goes back to Indo-Aryan times. But then, Mani did not live in Iran, he lived in Babylonia under Parthian and Persian occupation. One does not become automatically a member of the occupying nation when one lives for some time under a foreign oppressor.

Mani the Jew

Nor was Mani an Aryan. According to a trustworthy tradition his mother was called Miriam, a good Jewish name. At the age of four his father made him a kind of *puer oblatus* (an Essene custom) in a *kibbuz* of Christian Jews. The Elkesaites, among whom he grew up, were Law-abiding Jews, who strictly kept the Sabbath and practised circumcision.

Mani must have undergone this rite as a child. And the tradition about the encounter with his Twin and heavenly counterpart dramatises the historical fact that at the age of twelve he became a *bar mizwa*, like Jesus. Manichaean propaganda in the East later invented for him family ties with the royal house, but significantly the *Cologne Mani Codex*, a rather trustworthy biography of Mani, does not say a word about it. As often as not founders of a religion are said to be of princely origin. That is not necessarily true. I am happy to be in full agreement here with Michel Tardieu:

> La tradition manichéenne enjoliva le profil des origines de Mani. Par apologétique iranisante, les manichéens de Perse firent de Patteq un descendant d'une vieille famille parthe, les Haskaniya, ayant souche à Hamadan; ils attribuèrent quantité de noms à la mère de Mani: Mays, Karussa, Utakhim, Taqshit, Nuskit; ils rattachèrent cette femme à la famille des Kamsuragan, liée à la maison royale des Arsacides. L'attribution d'un haut lignage au fondateur d'une religion se vérifie également dans le bouddhisme et dans le christianisme.
>
> *Le Manichéisme*, Paris 1981, 5.

Numenius and inordinate concupiscence

Nor is it feasible to suppose that radical dualism of theological Zoroastrianism has induced Mani to eliminate the mitigated dualism of his gnostic predecessors with which he was familiar. The Persian religion did not identify good with spirit and evil with matter: the idea of matter was unknown in Iran. The conceptual framework for his rationalisations was already there in Hermetism. The *Asclepius* (14) teaches:

> fuit deus et hylé ... et mundo (= materiae) comitabatur spiritus vel inerat mundo spiritus.

As van Winden observes in his already mentioned dissertation (93), quoting Calcidius, this formulation is of Stoic origin:

> The Stoics also reject the idea that matter came into being. They rather regard matter and God as the two principles of everything.

Numenius, living in the century before Mani, considered matter as the origin of all evil (*malorum fons*), because inordinate, disorderly motion (*inordinatus motus*) is innate in the interior of matter itself.[25] Could it

be that Numenius here as so often, was inspired by the holy group of his Alexandrian Jews? They read in their Bible that in the beginning the earth was *ahoratos kai akataskeuastos*, invisible and inordinate, which is a platonising but not incorrect translation of Genesis 1,2. For the Bible neither here nor anywhere else knows of such a concept as the *creatio ex nihilo*. This was only later developed as a dogma by orthodox Catholicism, Judaism and Islam. The Bible presupposes a pre-existent chaos, *tehom*, *tiamat*. Not for nothing Philo of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Marcion, Hermogenes, Bardaisan, indeed even the fourth century Catholic Calcidius still hold that matter is pre-existent. The *Asclepius* too combined this Platonic idea with Genesis. And so did the gnostic Christian Mani.

Asymptotic thinking

Gershom Scholem, who after all was a mathematician, once observed that gnostic thinking was asymptotic: philosophy ran parallel with mythology and never the twain did meet. And Tertullian, with the sharp look of the hostile eye, remarked that the Valentinians called God *substantialiter* Perfect Aion and *personaliter* Forefather.[26] Hans-Jakob Polotsky summarised the Manichean doctrine with the abstract words: the *nous* saves the *psyché* out of the *hylé*, but added that these words had religious overtones.[27] And indeed you might say as well that the Spirit of Christ in us saves the suffering Jesus in the Cosmos from inordinate concupiscence. Therefore it is so thoroughly wrong to characterise Gnosis with one word, world-hate for instance: Hermetism is holistic and Cosmic; Valentinianism affirms sex and marriage; Manichaeism takes evil seriously, yet rejoices in salvation, beauty, music and garlands: it was a flower power. The most one can say is that it had a very peculiar concept of God which is neither Greek nor Israelite nor Iranian nor even Catholic: God *personaliter* is essentially Being in Movement *substantialiter*.[28]

The conceptualisation of Manichaeism is certainly of Hellenic origin and owes not a little to Plato and Numenius. But these ideas had to pass through Hermetism with its rites and rituals (like the kiss of peace, baptism with the Spirit and a holy meal). Moreover this conceptualisation was integrated by esoteric Judaism of Alexandria and so became Gnosticism before it reached Mani.

Mani's spiritual experience

But the heart of Manichaeism was fixed for ever by Mani's experiences as a youth. The Judaic Christians celebrated Easter in a very special way. They were quartodecimans and expected like their countrymen that the Messiah would come back at Mount Zion at *Pesaḥ* for the last judgment. As a newly discovered fragment of the Gospel of the Nazoraeans says:

> octo dies postremi pascae in quo iudicabitur totum semen Adae
> *Codex Val. Reg. Lat.* 49[29]

Gentile Christians celebrated at Easter Christ's resurrection. Judaic Christians anticipated at *Pesaḥ* the liberation of God's people. The Aramaic Christians too started to celebrate Easter on the 14th of Nisan. Mani's first followers transformed this festival into the Feast of the *Béma.*[30] But they always preserved the idea that in the end it was not Mani, the vicegerent of Christ, but Christ himself who would take his seat on this *béma* to judge mankind:

> Thou art glorious, blessed *Béma*, that shall reign unto the end of the world, until Jesus shall come and sit upon it and judge all nations.
> *Manichaean Psalmbook*, Allberry 25

The celebration of *Pesaḥ* in the *kibbuz* obviously had made an indelible impression upon young Mani. And this he conveyed to his followers who made *Pesaḥ* a feast of remembrance of Mani's death.

The *Cologne Mani Codex* has revealed how Mani already as a young man criticised the views of the Jewish Christians among whom he lived. There was much to revolt against. The *Pseudo-Clementine* writings tell us that according to these fundamentalists the devil is the left hand of God.[31] In other words, evil originates in God, good and evil, health and illness, riches and poverty issue from the hand of God. According to a trustworthy tradition Mani was a cripple. If so, he was a rebel with a cause. If not, there are reasons enough, terrible events enough in human life, to revolt against this view. Mani's dualism has existential roots. He did not need to go to far-away Iran to discern that evil, which was for him especially *libido* and inordinate concupiscence,[32] is a godless reality.

Moreover, dualism was not so important for him as *dualitudo*, the encounter with the Self. This Mani called his guardian angel or Holy Ghost (Paraklete) or Twin, very much according to the tradition of the

Aramaic Church in Mesopotamia.[33] The *Cologne Mani Codex* tells his religious experience in his own words:

> I recognised him
> and *saw that he was my Self*
> *from which I once had been separated.*

Mani revived the *Hymn of the Pearl* which he knew. Very much in the same way the pre-Christian Hermetic treatise "*The eighth and the ninth sphere*" describes the experience which is the aim and end of the Hermetic way, the vision of God and Self:

> No hidden word will be able to speak about thee, Lord.
> Therefore my mind wants to sing a hymn to you daily.
> I am the instrument of thy Spirit,
> My spirit is thy plectrum.
> And thy counsel plays a psalm on me.
> *I see myself.*
>
> II, 6, 60, 25ff.; Mahé I, 80, 25-32

Gnosticism from Hermes to Mani is an *Ouroboros*, a serpent biting in his tail, with a consistent and original tradition, which was nothing if not an imaginative expression of the encounter with the Self.[34]

Conclusion

The *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* in Armenian and Greek definitively prove that Gnosticism—pagan, Jewish and Christian—originated in Alexandria about the beginning of the Christian Era. Philo sometimes argues that there are three classes of men, but seems to polemicise against an invisible opposition when he opines that man at his creation received God's *pnoé* only, but not God's *pneuma*. His opponents may have been the circle of esoteric Jews mentioned by the philosopher Numenius, who indeed distinguished the higher Spirit from life, *psyché*, but also stressed that this divine element in man was a gift of God. From them even the Hermeticists learned that not all men have the Spirit as opposed to the soul.

This was taken over by Jewish gnostics like the author of the *Apokryphon of John* and by Christian gnostics like the Valentinians. St. Paul also opposes the *psychikoi* to the *pneumatikoi* in the first chapters of his first *Letter to the Corinthians*: he may have learned that from his fellow missionary, the Alexandrian Apollos.

Mani was familiar with the tripartition of mankind taught by earlier gnostics. He rebelled against the views of the fundamentalists among whom he grew up, according to whom God creates evil. According to Many evil, especially inordinate concupiscence, stems from matter, but the *nous* saves the *psyché* from *hylé*. This personal experience he rationalised in a system which has much in common with that of the Platonists and of Numenius.

Manichaeism in its original and authentic form is gnostic and hellenistic and owes very little to Iran. It is a myth of the Self, *dualitudo* rather than dualism.

[1] Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermes en Haute-Égypte* II, Quebec 1982, 393.

[2] Edelstein-Kidd, *Posidonius* I, Cambridge 1972, fragment 187, 6-8, page 170 and II, Cambridge 1988, page 676 (commentary).

[3] Ezekiel 1, 26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis, *VC* 34, 1980, 1-13.

[4] I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Leiden 1980, 128; Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, Tübingen 1984; Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, New Haven and London, 1990; G. Quispel, Hermes Trismegistus and Tertullian, *VC* 43, 1989, 188-190.

[5] J. Paramelle, J.-P. Mahé, Extraits hermétiques inédits d'un manuscrit d'Oxford, *Revue des Études Grecques*, 104 (1991), 109-139; idem, Nouveaux Parallèles Grecs aux Définitions Hermétiques Arméniennes, *Revue Arménienne* XXII, forthcoming.

[6] Roelof van den Broek, The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus, *VC* 40, 1, 1986, 1-23.

[7] Yvonne Janssens, *Les Leçons de Silvanos* (NH VII, 4), Québec 1983, 43 (translation of the author of this article).

[8] G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, Studies in Gnostic Mythology, Leiden 1984, 73-81.

[9] Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis 1990, 170 quotes *De specialibus legibus* 1, 277: τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν λογικοῦ πνεύματος.

[10] *Die Ophiten*, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des jüdischen Gnostizismus, Berlin 1889, 58.

[11] *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, edidit J. H. Waszink, *editio altera*, Leiden 1975.

[12] "Gnosis" in M. J. Vermaseren, *Die Orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich*, Leiden 1981, 417. My interpretation differs from that of M. J. Edwards, Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews, *VC* 44, 1990, 64-75. I think that 'O ὤν refers to "the One who is Being itself", the first (and unknown) God, who brings forth the soul from himself (προκαταβεβλήμενα) as a consubstantial *pneuma*, which is transplanted in us by the anthropomorphic demiurge. I agree with Edwards that Numenius refers to Jewish Gnostics, but do not think that they were necessarily heretical (*minim*) like the author of the *Apokryphon of John*.

[13] Cf. *C. H.* VIII, 5, Festugière I, 89; The third living being, man, is made after the image of the Kosmos.

[14] J. C. M. van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter. His doctrine and sources*, Leiden 1965, 255.

[15] Joan P. Couliano, *Expériences de l'extase*, Paris 1984.

[16] Idem in van Tongerloo-Giversen, *Manichaica Selecta*, Leuven 1991, 53-58. Cf. J. Flamant, Éléments Gnostiques dans l'oeuvre de Macrobe, in v.d. Broek-Vermaseren, *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, Leiden 1981, 131-142.

[17] Tertullien, *Contre les Valentiniens*, Sources Chrétiennes 281, II, Paris 1981, 332.

[18] Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, Manchester 1985, 50 and note 158: σωματικόν, ψυχικόν, πνευματικόν.

[19] Das Ebenbild geht vor dem Menschen einher, und Herolde rufen vor ihm aus. Was sprechen sie? Machet Platz für das Ebenbild Gottes. (*Deuteronomium Rabba* 4 (201d): Wunsche 57-58; Denn von jeder Seele steht das Ebenbild oder der Typus vor dem Angesicht Gottes vor der Grundlegung der Welt, *Testamentum Domini Syriace* (Rahmani 97); cf. —, *Makarius, das Thomasevangelium und das Lied von der Perle*, Leiden 1967; —, Das ewige Ebenbild des Menschen, in *Gnostic Studies* I, 145; C. Colpe, Daēnā, Lichtjungfrau in v.d. Broek-Vermaseren, *o.c.*, 58-77.

[20] *Contra Faustum* XIII, 1.

[21] Ephrem Syrus, *Prose Refutations*, Mitchell II, 98: For they say about Hermes in Egypt, and about Plato among the Greeks, and about Jesus who appeared in Judaea, that they are heralds of the Good One (God) to the world.

[22] L. Cirillo, Hermas dans la tradition manichéenne, in *Manichaica Selecta* 49.

[23] The study of Encratism, a historical survey, in: *La tradizione dell'Enkrateia*, Roma 1982, 60 and 70.

[24] Alfred Adam, *Texte zum Manichäismus*, Berlin 1954, 22.

[25] Van Winden, *o.c.*, 236: Calcidius remarks that there were men who thought that disorderly motion arose from matter itself. He certainly has in mind Numenius.

[26] *Adversus Valentinianos* VII, Fredouille I, 39: *Hunc substantialiter quidem* Αἰῶνα Τέλειον *appellant, personaliter vero* Προπάτορα *et* Προαρχήν, *etiam Bython.*

[27] Karl Schmitt, Hans Jakob Polotsky, *Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten*, SPAW, PH 1933, 81.

[28] As far as I know this process theology is evidenced for the first time in the *Astronomica* of the astrologer Manilius: *descendit deus atque habitat seque ipse requirit* (2, 107-108). It is presupposed in the *Esoteric Psalmbook*, Hymn 4 of the Hermetic Lodge in Alexandria: τὸ πᾶν τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν σῷζε, Ζωή (*CH* XIII, 19, N-F II, 208, 16). Possibly from there it was integrated into the Jewish Gnosis of the Samaritan Simon the Magician: Αὕτη, φησίν, ἐστὶ δύναμις μιά ... αὐτὴν ζήτουσα, αὐτὴν εὑρίσκουσα (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 6, 17, 3).

According to Valentinus Sophia, the suffering Goddess, and consequently all spiritual beings, are saved by Christ, who is consubstantial with God and with them.

Mani's myth expounds how the *Archanthropos* (= the Adam Qadmon of Ezekiel 1, 26), who is God himself, and *Jesus patibilis*, suffering in all living beings, are saved by configurations of the same Deity. Ferdinand Christian Baur tried in vain to prove that this (Hegelian) concept is also attested in some Catholic Fathers (cf. E. P. Meyering, *F. C. Baur als Patristiker*, Amsterdam 1986). Nevertheless he was right when he observed that because of this very specific concept Hegel was a Gnostic (*Die christliche Gnosis*, Tübingen 1835). For this reason his idealistic interpretation of Gnosticism is more adequate than the existentialistic (Heideggerian) interpretation of Hans Jonas.

[29] A. F. J. Klijn, Das Hebräer- und das Nazoräerevangelium, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II, 25, 5, 3997-4033v; idem, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, Leiden 1992, 131-133.

[30] G. Rouwhorst, Das manichäische Bemafest und das Passafest der syrischen Christen, *VC* 35, 1981, 397-411; idem, *Les Hymnes Pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, I Leiden 1989; —, Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis in Logan-Wedderburn, *The New Testament and Gnosis*, Edinburgh 1983, 52.

[31] *Ps-Clementine Homilies* XX, 3; Lactantius picked up this typically Jewish doctrine: cf. Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, Leiden 1991, 286. The Manichaeans were familiar with the Jewish Christian Gospel tradition, which stressed that evil came from God: *Man. Ps.* 148. Alberry II, 57: no cluster falls from a tree without the Lord God; *... to fall into a snare* = *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* XII, 31, 3 (Rehm) 190, 17): ἄνευ γὰρ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ βουλῆς οὐδὲ στρουθὸς *ἐν παγίδι* ἐμπεσεῖν ἔχει; *Man. Ps.* 239, Allberry 39,27: *the evil* too is near to be = *Ps. Clem. Hom.* XII, 29, 1 (Rehm 189, 6): τὰ κακὰ ἀνάγκη ἐλθεῖν.

[32] For Augustine and Manichaeans on *libido* and *concupiscentia inordinata* see J. van Oort, Augustine and Mani on Concupiscentia sexualis in J. den Boeft et J. van Oort (edd.), *Augustiniana Traiectina*, Paris 1987, 137-152.

[33] Aphraates says, in the Latin translation of Parisot: *Hic igitur Spiritus continenter vadit et stat ante deum, faciem eius intuetur* (*Mt* 18,10) *atque eum qui templo a se inhabitato noxam infert, ante Deum accusat* (*Dem.* VI, 15; Parisot I, 298), in M. Krause, *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts*, Brill, Leiden 1975, 160 and 161. Mani was a prophet in the Judaic-Christian sense of the word, a male or female who revealed something new to the congegration. Such a man has a very specific guardian angel, the Holy Spirit. Cf. Hermas, *Mand.* 11,9: then the angel of the prophetic spirit, who has been allotted to him (sc. the true prophet) fills the man, and the man, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks to the congegration as the Lord wills.

[34] Henry Chadwick, The attractions of Mani, in Romero-Pose, *Pleroma, Salus carnis*, Homenaje a Antonio Orbe, S. J., Compostela 1990, 216: To know the myth is to know oneself, to understand one's personal nature and ultimate destiny, to realise that we sin involuntarily and under an inward coercion from hostile and external forces.

3722 BR *Bilthoven*, Noordhoudringelaan 32